

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY ROME

INFO SECDEF

CNO WASHDC

CINCLANTFLT NORFOLK

USCINCEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

COMSIXTHFLT

COMSUBLANT NORVA

COMFAIRMED

COMSUBGRU EIGHT

COMSUBREFITRAGRU LA MADDALENA

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 172268

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, MARR, IT

SUBJECT: QUERY RE ITALIAN PRESS ACCOUNTS OF RADIOACTIVITY

BAY OF NAPLES

REF: ROME 10122

1. REFTTEL REQUESTED TEXT OF ANSWER WHICH CAN BE SENT TO
CNEN DIRECTOR ALBONETTI IN RESPONSE TO HIS REQUEST FOR
INFORMATION REGARDING NUCLEAR ACCIDENTS INVOLVING US NPW.
FOLLOWING TEXT (PARA 2 THRU 6) MAY BE USED.

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2. QUOTE. UNITED STATES NUCLEAR POWERED WARSHIPS HAVE BEEN IN OPERATION FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS AND HAVE VISITED OVER 130 PORTS BOTH FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC. WITH OVER 125 REACTORS CURRENTLY IN OPERATION, THE US NAVAL NUCLEAR PROPULSION PROGRAM HAS ACCUMULATED OVER 1150 YEARS OF REACTOR OPERATION WITHOUT EXPERIENCING A SINGLE NUCLEAR ACCIDENT.

3. THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT ACCIDENTS INVOLVING NUCLEAR POWERED SUBMARINES ARE THE LOSS OF THE USS THRESHER AND THE USS SCORPION. HOWEVER, THERE HAS BEEN NO EVIDENCE YET UNCOVERED THAT THESE LOSSES WERE DUE TO PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REACTOR. LIKEWISE THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT THESE ACCIDENTS RESULTED IN ANY RELEASE OF RADIOACTIVITY TO THE ENVIRONMENT.

4. THE FOLLOWING EXTRACTS ARE TAKEN FROM A REPORT ON THESE LOSSES PUBLICLY ISSUED BY THE US NAVY.

TWO US NAVY NUCLEAR POWERED SUBMARINES HAVE BEEN LOST AT SEA IN THE ATLANTIC OCEAN. THE SUBMARINE THRESHER SANK 10 APRIL 1963, 100 MILES FROM LAND IN WATER 8,500 FEET DEEP AT LATITUDE 41 DEGREES 45 FEET N AND LONGITUDE 65 DEGREES 00 FEET W. THE SUBMARINE SCORPION SANK BETWEEN 21 AND 17 MAY 1968, 400 MILES SOUTHWEST OF THE AZORES IN MORE THAN 10,000 FEET OF WATER. THE REACTORS USED IN ALL US NAVAL SUBMARINES AND SURFACE SHIPS ARE DESIGNED TO MINIMIZE POTENTIAL HAZARDS TO THE ENVIRONMENT EVEN UNDER THE MOST SEVERE CASUALTY CONDITIONS SUCH AS ACTUAL SINKING OF A SHIP. FIRST, THE REACTOR CORE IS SO DESIGNED THAT IT IS PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR IT TO EXPLODE LIKE A BOMB. SECOND THE REACTOR FUEL ELEMENTS ARE MADE OF MATERIALS THAT ARE EXTREMELY CORROSION RESISTANT, EVEN IN SEA WATER. THE REACTOR CORE COULD REMAIN SUBMERGED IN SEA WATER FOR DECADES WITHOUT RELEASE

OF FISSION PRODUCTS WHILE THE RADIOACTIVITY DECAYS SINCE THE PROTECTIVE CLADDING ON THE FUEL ELEMENTS CORRODES ONLY A FEW MILLIONTHS OF AN INCH PER YEAR. THUS IN THE EVENT OF A SERIOUS ACCIDENT WHERE THE REACTOR IS COM-
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PLETELY SUBMERGED IN SEA WATER, THE FUEL ELEMENTS WILL REMAIN INTACT FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD OF TIME AND THE RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL CONTAINED IN THESE FUEL ELEMENTS SHOULD NOT BE RELEASED. THE MAXIMUM RATE OF RELEASE AND DISPERSAL OF THE RADIOACTIVITY IN THE OCEAN, EVEN IN THE PROTECTIVE CLADDING ON THE FUEL WERE DESTROYED, WOULD BE SO LOW AS TO BE INSIGNIFICANT.

'RADIATION MEASUREMENTS, WATER SAMPLES, BOTTOM SEDIMENT SAMPLES AND DEBRIS COLLECTED FROM THE AREA WHERE THRESHER SANK HAVE BEEN ANALYZED FOR RADIOACTIVITY BY VARIOUS LABORATORIES WITH HIGHLY SENSITIVE EQUIPMENT. SIMILARLY, SEA WATER AND BOTTOM SEDIMENT SAMPLES TAKEN NEAR SCORPION'S HULL HAVE BEEN ANALYZED FOR RADIOACTIVITY. NONE OF THESE SAMPLES SHOWED RADIOACTIVITY ABOVE NATURALLY OCCURRING BACKGROUND LEVELS AND NONE SHOWED EVIDENCE OF RADIOACTIVITY RELEASED FROM EITHER THRESHER OR SCORPION.'

5. WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER LESS SEVERE ACCIDENTS INVOLVING US NUCLEAR SUBMARINES, SOME OF WHICH HAVE BEEN MINOR SHIP COLLISIONS, NONE OF THESE HAVE AFFECTED THE SAFETY OF THE REACTOR NOR DID THEY RESULT IN ANYTHING OF RADIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN THIS REGARD. THERE HAVE BEEN NO NUCLEAR SUBMARINE COLLISIONS IN ITALIAN WATERS ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL CASES WHERE BARGES SUFFERED DAMAGE WHILE BEING USED TO SERVICE NUCLEAR SUBMARINES MOORED IN PORT. HOWEVER, THE SUBMARINE INVOLVED WAS NOT DAMAGED IN ANY OF THESE INSTANCES.

6. THE US NAVY REPORTS ANNUALLY THE TOTAL RELEASE OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS FROM US NAVY NUCLEAR POWERED SHIPS AND THEIR SUPPORT FACILITIES. THESE REPORTS DETAIL THE RADIOACTIVITY RELEASED WITHIN TWELVE MILES FROM SHORE INCLUDING THAT WHICH HAS RESULTED FROM ANY SHIP ACCIDENTS THAT MAY OCCUR. I HAVE ATTACHED A COPY OF THE LATEST REPORT, NT 74-1, 'ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AND DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTES FROM U.S. NAVAL NUCLEAR POWERED SHIPS AND THEIR SUPPORT FACILITIES' DATED APRIL 1974. THIS REPORT SHOWS THAT THE TOTAL RADIOACTIVITY RELEASED FROM ANY CAUSE AT ALL HARBORS OF THE WORLD
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INCLUDING ITALIAN HARBORS WAS LESS THAN 0.002 CURIES IN 1973. AS I AM CERTAIN YOU WILL APPRECIATE THIS IS TOO SMALL TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECT. END QUOTE

7. FYI. THE REPORT REFERRED TO IN PARAGRAPH 4 IS THE ISSUE OF THE US NAVY WORLDWIDE ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1971, NT-72-1 OF FEBRUARY 1972. A COPY OF THIS REPORT IS BEING POUCHED SEPARATELY. THE QUOTED PORTION, WHICH MAY BE FOUND ON PAGE 10 OF THIS REPORT, HAS NOT BEEN INCLUDED IN THE SUBSEQUENT REPORTS, COPIES OF WHICH HAVE BEEN PREVIOUSLY SENT TO CHMAAG, ROME AND EMBASSY. EMBASSY IS REQUESTED TO FURNISH DEPT WITH A COPY OF THE REPLY TO ALBONETTI FOR RECORD PURPOSES. END FYI. KISSINGER

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